



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**THE EFFECTS OF USING SONGS TO TEACH THE SUBJECT-VERB
AGREEMENT TO LOW PROFICIENCY L2 LEARNERS**

WOO MEI WAH

FPP 2000 15

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AGREEMENT TO LOW PROFICIENCY L2 LEARNERS**

By

WOO MEI WAH

**Project Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science in the Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia**

November 2000



DEDICATION

To my most beloved parents...thank you for your inspirational love, steadfast support, patience, care, and understanding in motivating me to give my utmost best in all that I do.



Abstract of project paper presented to the Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.

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Supervisor: Dr. Arshad bin Abdul Samad

Faculty : Educational Studies

This paper is an exploratory attempt to investigate the effects of using songs with activities and without activities to teach the subject-verb agreement to second language (L2) subjects of low proficiency. This is a qualitative study involving two treatment groups using songs to teach the subject-verb agreement. However, one group will be given the treatment with activities while the other will be given the same treatment without the activities. This study aims to find out if there is any significant difference between the two treatment groups. The subjects of this study are thirty low proficiency Form Four students from a suburban secondary school in Kapar, 16 kilometres from Kelang district. The focus of this study is on the findings of the pre-test/ post-test, the lesson plans carried out, and the subjects' responses obtained from the questionnaire given. Observations are also reported from the researcher's anecdotal record and the observer's checklist.

The findings of this study reveal that there is no statistical significant difference between the two groups. However, there are descriptive differences and individual improvements made. The reactions obtained from the subjects are positively encouraging although the scores obtained, on the overall, do not reflect these positive responses felt. The findings from this study do not meet expectations anticipated. The researcher hopes that this exploratory attempt can be replicated or improved in future to confirm the claims and findings made in this study. Much more needs to be done to verify the effectiveness of using songs in the Malaysian ESL classroom.

**KESAN PENGGUNAAN LAGU DALAM PENGAJARAN TATABAHASA
“SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT” KEPADA PELAJAR YANG
KURANG FASIH DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS.**

Oleh

WOO MEI WAH

November 2000

Penyelia : Dr. Arshad bin Abd. Samad

Fakulti : Pengajian Pendidikan

Kajian ini adalah satu percubaan untuk menyelidiki keberkesanan penggunaan lagu dengan aktiviti dan tanpa aktiviti untuk mengajar “subject-verb agreement”. Kajian ini berunsur kualitatif yang melibatkan dua kumpulan eksperimental. Kedua-dua kumpulan ini diberi treatmen yang sama di mana lagu Bahasa Inggeris digunakan untuk mengajar “subject-verb agreement”. Kumpulan A diberi treatmen dengan aktiviti tetapi Kumpulan B diberi treatmen tanpa aktiviti. Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengesan samada terdapat perbezaan signifikan di antara Kumpulan A yang menggunakan aktiviti dan lagu, dan Kumpulan B yang hanya menyanyi lagu-lagu tersebut. Penyelidik juga ingin mengesan keberkesanan penggunaan lagu untuk mengajar “subject-verb agreement”. Subjek penyelidikan ini terdiri daripada 30 murid perempuan, yang menghadapi masalah dalam “subject-verb agreement”, dari Tingkatan Empat SMK(P) Kapar, di Kelang. Fokus kajian ini adalah berasaskan dapatan dari skor ujian pra / post, dan respon subjek dalam soal selidik. Data juga diperolehi daripada seorang pemerhati disamping nota “anecdotal” penyelidik.

Dapatan daripada analisis skor ujian mereka ini adalah tidak signifikan. Ini bermakna kajian ini tidak dapat membuktikan penggunaan lagu samada dengan aktiviti ataupun tanpa aktiviti itu berkesan untuk mengajar " subject-verb agreement". Walaubagaimanapun, respon yang diberikan oleh subjek kajian ini adalah positif dan menggalakkan. Adalah diharap penyelidikan ini dapat dilanjutkan atau diulangi untuk kepastian keberkesanan penggunaan lagu untuk pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris di dalam konteks negara sendiri.

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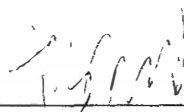
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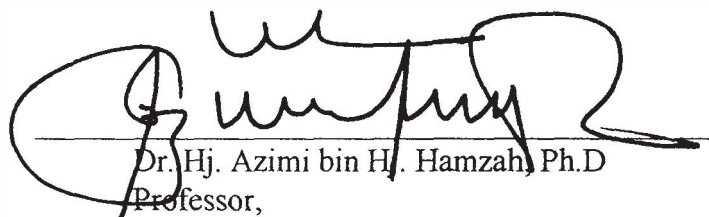
Thank you, all.

I hereby confirm that I have examined the project entitled “The Effects Of Using Songs To Teach Subject-Verb Agreement To Low Proficiency L2 Learners”, by Woo Mei Wah. I agree that the project has been accepted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.



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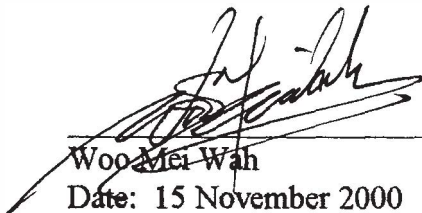
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Date : 15. 11. 2000

DECLARATION FORM

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the project paper is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.



Woo Mei Wah
Date: 15 November 2000

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CI	:	comprehensible input
ESL	:	English as a Second Language
LAD	:	Language Acquisition Device
L2	:	second language
MI	:	Multiple Intelligences
S-V-A	:	subject-verb agreement
SLA	:	second language acquisition

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Music, when soft voices die, vibrates in the memory.”

- George Bernard Shaw

In many cultures of the world population, music and songs are integral expressions of people's lives. Songs are expressions musically vocalised while music is the harmoniously “pleasing combinations of sounds in rhythm” (Hornby, 1974, p. 557). The fundamental aim in both is communication.

People learn languages in many ways. Listening to songs may be one of the ways in which an individual learns a language. The use of songs in language learning is not new although its practice amongst teachers and educators is somewhat limited. Since most people enjoy music and songs in a variety of ways in all their diverse cultures, this study seeks to find out if the use of songs can be beneficial to language learning. The motivation behind this study is twofold. It assumes that firstly, the second language (L2) learner may consciously or subconsciously internalise the language skills and structures of the English language if he listens often to English songs, and that secondly, learning is reinforced by accompanying activities.

Cornett (1999, p. 333) attests that singing songs naturally integrates the language skills of listening, speaking, and reading. It is implied that the L2 learner may learn from the clear enunciation of words and vocabulary contained in the songs. In other words, apart from

the intentional listening pleasure, the L2 learner may also indirectly absorb the sound system (ie.: intonation, rhythm, stress patterns) and pronunciation skills of the target language contained in the linguistic content of the lyrics. Furthermore, the L2 learner is exposed to richer vocabulary, the syntax of sentences, and the grammar system in the learning process.

The researcher feels that when the L2 learner reads the lyrics and sings the song, he is actually practising his pronunciation and reading skills while sub-consciously focusing on the language used. It has been observed that some L2 learners attempt to apply certain words or phrases used in songs to express their feelings in their conversations. In attempting to exploit this potential of songs, it is hoped that English can be “caught” in a more enjoyable, effective and less intimidating way than formal lessons taught in class. In this respect, the combination of songs with selected language learning activities may prove especially effective.

Although research carried out on the use of songs in language learning and teaching in the local context is limited, the potential motivational effects of songs cannot be denied. Based on this premise, this study intends to explore the effects of using songs with activities and without activities, to teach the subject-verb agreement to thirty L2 learners from a suburban school in Kapar, 16 kilometres from Kelang, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

Background of the Study

One of the factors that has contributed to the decline of English amongst Malaysian L2 learners may be their under exposure to the English language. This is especially true for those who live in the rural and the suburban areas nation-wide. This factor may be a handicap to the learning process as it causes feelings of linguistic inadequacy in many learners from such backgrounds. These L2 learners lack the motivation to learn simply because of the dearth of exposure and language use in their non-English speaking environments. The exposure to English is limited to only the few hours of learning and practice in formal English lessons in classes every week. Surely, this is insufficient exposure for one to become proficient in the language. This deprivation of surrounding stimuli must therefore be overcome.

As a catalyst to learning, it should be noted that the motivation level of the learner should be high. It is important that learners express “a general willingness to enter into a learning situation...” (Davies, 1971, p. 150). This learning situation is what Gagne (1965, p. 6) terms as “a learning event...(which) takes place when the stimulus situation affects the learner in such a way...that the change in performance is what leads to the conclusion that learning has occurred”. He also proposes that language learning should begin with “the simplest type of learning” (p. 6) which is stimulus-response learning. He believes that the learner must first begin to imitate sounds in the target language before he can generate words for himself in his effort to communicate using the language. This is precisely the principle applied in this approach to use songs as a stimulus to elicit the affective

“willingness” of the learner concerned as purported by Davies (1971). In addition, he reiterates that it is the teachers’ responsibility to “create an environment which is compatible with both students’ needs and the needs of the task” (p. 150). Teachers should exude a supportive attitude to students’ learning to help the learner experience a sense of personal achievement in his language learning endeavour.

Rationale of the Study

This exploratory study seeks to examine the effectiveness of using songs in language learning. More specifically, it intends to investigate the differential effect of using songs with and without activities. The learning or acquisition of the subject-verb agreement is emphasised. It is the most important grammatical skill one can learn (Choy & Clark, 1994, p. 2) and is a fundamental skill to acquiring precision in the language. In all formal use of English, the agreement of the verb with its subject must be strictly adhered to (Bachelor & Haley, 1949). In other words, this basic skill in grammar is important to the L2 learner’s mastery in the target language.

This study suggests that the use of songs helps L2 learners acquire the ability to identify subjects and verbs because of the repetitive structures contained in the lyrics. It is assumed these repetitive patterns of grammatical structures can be reinforced into the L2 learners’ thought processing systems by the music and rhythm of the songs. It is also assumed that activities which accompany the songs can also help reinforce and help retain the grammatical structures given as input.

Statement of the Problem

Many L2 learners in rural and suburban schools find it difficult to speak, or read in English. It is even more difficult to get them to write grammatically correct sentences during their writing lessons. This inability to function in the English language is due to two possible reasons. Firstly, the dearth of exposure to the language and secondly, the lack of need to use the language in their immediate environments.

This problem is further compounded by the fact that some teachers teach English using Bahasa Melayu in their classes, thus further reducing the contact exposure of English in the formal lessons of the ESL classroom. This has adversely contributed to the L2 learners' poor command of the language, especially in grammar. One of the common problems faced by the majority of L2 learners, in such cases, is the subject-verb agreement.

Since listening to songs is a favourite pastime with most students, the researcher feels that the use of songs may be one of the possible ways in which a language can be taught. The easy accessibility to popular songs, their lyrics, the affordable cost, the interests of the students, the linguistic content, and the repetitive structures in songs are reasons why they should be used in the language classroom. It is the researcher's hope that songs can be exploited to teach the subject-verb agreement.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this exploratory experimental study is to investigate the effects of using songs to teach subject-verb agreement to L2 learners in the ESL classroom. It seeks to find which of the two treatment groups is more effective: the one which uses songs with activities, or the one without activities. It also aims to investigate if there has been any improvement in students' scores after the treatment on songs has been administered. This study also attempts to examine L2 learners' responses to the use of songs. Thus, the research questions for this study are:

1. Has the use of songs been effective in improving the scores of the subjects in subject-verb agreement?
2. Will there be a significant difference in the scores obtained between the subjects from Group A (using songs with activities) and the subjects from Group B (using songs without activities)?
3. What are L2 learners' reactions to the use of songs in learning English?

Definition of Terms

Song

According to Hornby (1974), a song is usually a short poem or a number of verses set to music and intended to be sung. Ur (1984) further categorises songs in language teaching into two types. In type 1, the songs are specially composed English teaching songs. These songs feature discrete language items, as well as aspects of language or syllabus topics.

Type 2 comprises 'authentic' popular songs. The main feature of these songs is to entertain. While songs contain cultural values, the language aspect is an ancillary bonus.

Nallin (1968) defines a song as mankind's oldest means of music expression which usually comprises a narrative poem sung in a lyrical tune. According to Wong (1993, p. 9), songs give enjoyment, satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, gratifying emotions and release.

Subject-Verb Agreement

According to Bachelor and Haley (1949), the verb in every sentence or clause must agree with its subject in person and number. There are three persons: the first person is the speaker; the second person is the person spoken to; the third person is the person or thing spoken of. There are two numbers: the singular and the plural. In all formal use of English, the agreement of the verb with its subject must be strictly adhered to; sometimes in colloquial or conversational English exceptions are made to this rule.

Activity

According to Hornby (1989, p. 13), an activity is a specific thing or action done.

Significance of the Study

The researcher hopes that this study would help contribute to the ESL teacher's repertoire of teaching strategies. The study hopes to provide valuable insights into the effective use of songs as a possible teaching tool to teach subject-verb agreement (S-V-A). In this exploratory study, two methods of using songs are examined. The use of songs with activities and without activities will provide insights into the learning process of learners as well as into the optimal means of using songs in language teaching.

It is also hoped that this study will lead to further research in this area. Presently, the researcher feels that the potentiality of songs in improving ESL language learning, especially in how it is best used, is under examined. Very little research on how songs are most effectively used to teach aspects of grammar has been carried out in the local context.

Limitations of the Study

This is only an exploratory study to investigate the effects of using songs with activities and without activities in teaching the subject-verb agreement to two treatment groups of L2 subjects who have problems in this grammatical area. This small experimental study does